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ABSTRACT

This document looks at the college student who is an adult child from a dysfunctional family, applying Chickering's seven vectors of college-age student development to that student's experiences at college. Each of Chickering's seven vectors (developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, and developing integrity) is examined separately to illustrate how the requirements of each task contradict the natural tendencies of the adult child and the environment from which he has come. Student affairs professionals are offered guidelines to follow in helping adult child college students who have experienced dysfunctional development. Student affairs professionals are advised to: (1) set clear limits and boundaries; (2) communicate; (3) instill trust; (4) respect the adult child experience; (5) encourage involvement; (6) discourage self-abuse; and (7) know their own limits. The document concludes that, by meeting students where they are and guiding them within a safe and functional environment, student affairs professionals can show students that they trust the students to succeed and that they will not reject students if they do not succeed. (NB)

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[Chickering's Vectors and the Adult Child Experience]

Twenty years after Arthur W. Chickering outlined the developmental tasks undertaken by college-age students, it is evidenced that the results of his research still hold true. There is little doubt that the vectors described in Education and Identity are the areas in which students will experience the greatest change. As the demographic face of the college student changes, however, there have been many challenges to Chickering -- re-examinations of the seven vectors and their applications toward the contemporary college or university experience

Chickering himself pointed out that students "will be in different places developmentally" and warned against treating students as if their needs and experiences were identical (Chickering, 1969). One set of needs and experiences which has become of importance to clinical and popular psychologists alike is the phenomenon of the Adult Child, defined by Steven Farmer as an individual who "continue(s) to be trapped by their past, yet only vaguely aware that their present-day difficulties are substantially related to their childhood history " (Farmer, 1989). The term which was first used in reference to Adult Children of Alcoholics has now been expanded to involve children of other types of substance abuse and compulsive addictions, physical violence, incest, or any manner of behavior which resulted in a dysfunctional environment in which the individual was reared. The term Adult Child has come to stand on its own, as consistent attitudes and experiences are shared by Adult Children, regardless of the nature of the dysfunction in their individual

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environments.

The correlation between the Adult Child's experience and the developmental tasks she faces as she begins college provide tremendous insight for student affairs professionals who may feel astounded or frustrated by a student's failure to accomplish (or refusal to attempt) the tasks which are laid before her. It is interesting that Chickering's groundbreaking work in Education and Identity makes little mention of the importance of family influence on the college-age student. Recently, counselor and theologian John Bradshaw has stated that "the family is the soil which provides the emotional needs of the various members...includ(ing) a balance between autonomy and dependency, and social and sexual training" (Bradshaw, 1988).

Obviously, our students do not come to us pristine, as if from a void. They will bring with them all the prior training they have had in areas surrounding competence, emotions, autonomy, identity, relationships, integrity, and sense of purpose. If that prior training took place in a healthy, functional environment they stand a good chance of making healthy, functional (though not necessarily painless) progressions through the developmental vectors. They will learn to make considered choices in order to solve problems, to appreciate the diversity of their experiences and their peers, and to perform objective self-assessments and evaluations. On the other hand, if an individual is coming out of a dysfunctional environment, where he has learned to endure blame, denial, silence, inconsistency and unreliability, where he has been emotionally, physically or sexually abused (or perhaps all three), then he will be slower to develop in

these areas than his classmates, because he is being asked to behave in opposition to what he has spent his entire life learning.

Let us examine Chickering's vectors separately to illustrate how the requirements of each task contradict the natural tendencies of the Adult Child and the environment from which he has just emerged.

I. Developing Competence

Consider the point of view of the Adult Child, who has had his competence consistently brought into question throughout his upbringing. This does not have to occur through something as blatant as name calling ("You're so stupid!," though that does happen often enough). It occurs through a conspiracy of silence and denial enforced by the dysfunctional family system. "Mommy is tired," when Mommy is really drunk; "Daddy loves you," when Daddy has committed incest. In general, "parents [tell] you what you felt, what you saw, what you heard, were wrong" (Farmer, 1989). Furthermore, the inconsistency of the dysfunctional family, and its unclear rules and boundaries will cause a child to stop trying to trust his own judgement and instincts and "survive by denying [his] thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, denying [his] situation to others and eventually to [him]self" (Farmer, 1989).

Chickering quotes Argyris (1965) as saying that "human competence tends to increase... as problems are solved in such a way that they remain solved." The day to day problems of the dysfunctional family may be "solved," but the underlying problem never is. Chickering writes that "increased competence accompanies readiness to take

responsibility, increasing openness, and increasing willingness to take risks with one's self-esteem." The student who encounters her greatest obstacle achieving this sense of competence, then, may never find success at subsequent tasks.

II. Managing Emotions

An individual denying the reality of his situation, as Adult Children do, is going to have difficulty managing the emotions he feels in response to that situation. Abused children learn to shut down their emotions in order to stop their pain. Hopelessness, shame, fear, and rage are extremely powerful to them -- too powerful to confront. As they grow older they are taught that experiencing emotions means acting on them in harmful ways; in other words, that anger equals violence, or sexuality equals rape. The Adult Child has also learned that happiness is temporary, and that the disappointments are more painful when they follow a time of good feeling. One of Farmer's clients recalled

> I've never had a problem with getting too upset over things. I've always been the one to handle whatever is needed. What I'm discovering, though, is that while I don't get upset, I also don't feel "up" much of the time. I know a person can't have the highs without the lows, but I don't know how to do either."
>
> (Farmer, 1989).

In his discussion of this vector, Chickering includes a description of "emotional immaturity," which bears striking resemblance to the personality traits of an Adult Child, including a sense of being bound by one's own problems, an inability to master

one's own talents, a tendency to fight developmental problems on an internal arena, admissions of one's ineffectiveness, impulsive irresponsibility, introverted nonsocial behavior, ineffective communication, and difficulty with reality orientation. The student who appears emotionally immature may, in fact, be exhibiting what her environment has taught her is normal behavior.

III. Developing Autonomy

Here is where the Adult Child can fool us. Typically, the child of a dysfunctional family system has taught himself what appears to be textbook autonomy -- by Chickering's own definition the ability to a) carry on activities on one's own, b) cope with problems without seeking help, and c) be mobile (flexible) in relation to one's needs and desires (Chickering 1969). Step one toward achieving autonomy, Chickering adds, is the decreasing need for social approval, which the Adult Child has long ago stopped expecting.

The Autonomy Vector includes one of Chickering's few implications of parents in the development of the college age student, and that is to advocate separation from parental influence as a step toward developing autonomy. There is no mention of the family system. The Adult Child has already detached herself from one or both of her parents, and perhaps other family members as well. In many instances, where a "weak parent" exists, (through physical estrangement, drug addiction, mental illness, for example), the child has been made into a substitute spouse by the remaining parent and may have been making and accomplishing family goals from an early age (Bradshaw, 1988).

Moreover, the incongruent communication so prevalent in

dysfunctional families may drive a child into an autonomous survival stance, where he has only to look after himself. The lies and denial mentioned above are compounded by family triangles where children may be used as weapons against each other, or a parent, unless the child rejects the need for approval which makes him an easy victim in those triangles. In the worst case scenarios, that need for approval becomes a tool for the violence of incest and physical abuse.

So the Adult Child comes to the college or university environment apparently a model of autonomy -- seemingly self-assured, independent, self-motivated, and dependable. She may have indeed accomplished what Chickering calls "Emotional and Instrumental Autonomy, " but there are steps beyond that which may be her sticking place. Recognition of interdependence, the final step in fully developing autonomy, means understanding that "loving and being loved are necessarily complimentary" (Chickering, 1969). This is quite a turnaround for the Adult Child, who only knows that loving means disappointment and rejection; and being loved, in his household, never manifested itself in pleasant ways. It will be difficult for the Adult Child to come from a lifetime of withdrawal to an independent connectedness with others.

IV. Establishing Identity

It is no coincidence that establishing identity is the central vector of all developmental tasks undertaken by college-age students. Chickering recognized it as being interwoven with the other vectors -- constantly developing, and developing with, the others he named. For those reasons, it is also the most difficult area for Adult Children

to confront, much less change. The establishment of identity must come first out of a belief that one is worthy of possessing such a thing, and the Adult Child lacks the self-esteem required to make the small step from occupying space on the planet to asserting an identity. Dr. Susan Forward, author of Toxic Parents reports that abused children suffer "damaged self-esteem...In one way or another, they almost all feel worthless, unlovable, and inadequate" (Forward, 1989).

The distance that Adult Children keep from themselves may arrest their first steps toward establishing identity, which Chickering explains are coming to terms with their physical and sexual selves. Physically, they are removed from their bodies as a means of denying their pain, as explained under the first vector. They are actually unable to feel sensations which to others seem quite ordinary. Psychologist Steven Farmer suggests to his clients that they spend meditation time concentrating on physical sensations: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. The Adult Child needs to understand his physical body before he can assert a physical identity.

This physical identity does not mean that a sexual identity will necessarily follow. The Adult Child's interpretation of sex and intimacy is discussed further below, but before the Adult Child can exercise her sexual identity, she must discover it. When the child comes from a physically abusive environment, whether it included incest or not, the idea of desiring and deserving physical intimacy is very frightening indeed. Compulsive behaviors often come out of this confusion over physical/sexual identity, partly because, as Bryan Robinson explains it, Adult Children "often store their feelings and

anxieties in the confines of their bodies" (Robinson, 1989). John Bradshaw describes patients of his who were dangerously obese or anorexic as a result of their compulsive behaviors. Individuals out of touch with their basic sense of identity would, consciously or unconsciously, make themselves so unattractive that no one would want to be near them, to touch them, and especially to have sex with them (Bradshaw, 1990).

V. Freeing Interpersonal Relationships

Perhaps the only thing more overwhelming than the academic challenges a college or university student faces are the numbers and types of relationships she will encounter before her experience is behind her. Suddenly in the college environment there are many relationships, and they are almost all wide in scope, and emotionally deep. Openness and trust, Chickering writes, characterize these relationships, which become increasingly mature and intimate as those involved grow along their other developmental lines (Chickering, 1969). Increased tolerance and respect for diversity means a diminished need for one member to always be in a dominant or central role, as is typical of adolescent relationships.

What then, of the Adult Child? If she is in self-exile, denying her emotions, and feeling unworthy of being loved, how does she free her interpersonal relationships? The response is likely to be one of two extremes. She may continue this self-exile, her need for affection struggling with her inability to receive it when it is offered. She will express her feelings cautiously, not trusting that they are valid, and stop expressing them immediately when they are not heard or

understood. She will build personal and emotional boundaries to keep others out, playing on her autonomy skills to show how independent she is (Farmer, 1988). Bryan Robinson explains, "Difficulty being intimate is the hallmark at this stage [adolescence to early adulthood] because stuffed feelings from childhood impair the ability to feel or express emotions" (Robinson, 1989).

The Adult Child may also choose the other extreme by entering quickly, and often, into intimate relationships, believing each one to be the relationship which will rescue him from himself -- that will give him the identity he is unable to find. He will be so grateful for the demonstration of affection from his partners that he will idealize them, perhaps idolize them, and constantly find himself lacking in comparison to them. He will relentlessly test the boundaries of the relationship because of his own lack of self-esteem, proving that he is unlovable. When he is eventually rejected or even abused by his partner he will be satisfied by the reinforcement of what his experience has shown him -- that contact equals abuse, and abuse equals affection -- and cling more tightly to that now unfulfilling relationship. (Farmer, 1988).

Remember, too, that Adult Children tend to select as partners, friends and mentors, the same types of people who abused them in the first place, because we are all naturally drawn to what is familiar.

VI. Developing Purpose

Purpose must have as a pre-requisite Identity and Self-Esteem, so Adult Children may be some time in even approaching work in this area. "The family," says Bradshaw, "is the place where the attainment of

self-esteem takes place" (Bradshaw, 1988). Years of reinforcement to a child that she is herself bad (also unwanted, unappreciated, unintelligent, even clumsy or unattractive) prevent her from asserting in her new adulthood all those aspects of herself that she should be discovering as she develops purpose within her environment.

We know so well the students who use self-deprecating language, who sabotage their own projects through chronic procrastination or poor planning, who are prevented from participating because they are constantly sick, and in other ways manage to convince themselves (and eventually their campus communities) that they have no purpose, no contributions to make.

VII. Developing Integrity

Questions such as "is humanity basically evil? basically good?" are out of the realm of the Adult Child, who will likely answer "Humanity is basically good; I am basically evil," if he feels qualified to define good and evil at all. We have examined throughout this discussion how the Adult Child cannot trust his own feelings and perceptions, much less the words and promises of his closest role models, his parents. Having grown up in a system with inconsistent rules (where rules existed at all), double standards for parents and children (or males and females), and no role in "family" decision making (or adult guidance in making the decisions thrust upon him by his own autonomy), the Adult Child is ill-prepared to humanize his value system, as Chickering describes. He lacks the skills to even define that system, since that would suggest that he is a moral human being and capable of "goodness." The Adult Child who reaches this

vector will require a strong role model to teach him how to practice his integrity day to day.

As Student Affairs professionals, what can we expect to do for our students who have experienced dysfunctional family systems? The last thing we should want to do is put a label on any student and use that label to determine how we will relate to him. We can require of Adult Children what we require of any other student; there is still, behind the survivalist's façade, an individual with ideas, talents, and aspirations, who is aching to belong to something that is functioning and healthy.

In Education and Identity, Chickering describes some of the "conditions for impact" for the best possible growth along the developmental vectors. The conditions he outlines are the same conditions which make up what we know as a functional system: consistancy of objectives, one-to-one contact between members of the system, discussion and inter-active problem solving, a meaningful sense of "culture," and frequent and friendly interaction with role models. The Adult Child can learn to work within this environment, but it is certain to be confusing for him, and he may even react against its foreignness for a time. The student affairs professional needs to recognize the significance of a student's failure to develop at the same rate and in the same ways as his classmates. The professional needs to understand that what this new environment is requiring of a student are the things he was punished for attempting in the past.

While there is no recipe of steps we can adopt in order to facilitate the development of Adult Children, there are a few

guidelines we can remember as they struggle to adjust to their new environment. The following has been culled from many psychologists and child development counselors, specifically Ackerman, Robinson, and Farmer. Many of the ideas they suggest may already be part of one's individual management style -- in fact, they are sound advice for dealing with anyone -- but are of special concerns considering the dysfunctional development of Adult Children.

1) Set Clear Limits and Boundaries

He won't like it, but the first thing a student coming out of a dysfunctional environment needs is a clear understanding of the rules of this new culture. Remember that his ideas about authority are distorted, that his life has been without structure to this point, or that he is accustomed to designing his own structure. Volunteer contracts, position descriptions, and time schedules are especially helpful for letting a student know what is expected of him. It is also valuable to let the student voice his own expectations of you as his advisor or supervisor. It is likely that he has never been asked to voice his needs in this way before and will need guidance to know what are fair expectations.

It may surprise you to know you will have to require him to "play" as much as you require him to work. Free time and relaxation are not within the usual "routine" of the Adult Child. He is generally self-sacrificing and eager to prove how much he can help, how capable he is. It can be tempting to take advantage of such energy without realizing its source. Consider that the student does not

schedule free or creative time anywhere in his day, and time spent with you may be his only opportunity for play.

It is not enough for an environment to be structured, if the structure is not a safe one. Conflicts will arise, and depending on the student's prior knowledge of conflict, he will respond by reacting violently or by withdrawing from the conflict completely. Of course neither of these is healthy. He will need your guidance to learn how to effectively resolve conflicts, how to express anger and disappointment, how to positively assert his opinions, and constructively criticize the opinions of others. Adult Children are usually the participants who learn the most from their first formal workshop on Supportive/Defensive Communication.

2) Communicate

At the most basic level, listen to what the student is telling you, and respond. You will gain your first clues about a student's family situation from ordinary conversation. By actively listening to what a student has to say, you will begin to understand the role she plays in her family, and how that family training affects the way she behaves in her new environment. As mentioned above, ask the student her opinion on things and encourage her to explore why she feels the way she does about the issues in question. You will also want to be attentive to the words you choose -- do you speak negatively more than positively? Are you more inclined to tell a student what not to do than what she could do? Are you using positive body language when you communicate, or do you shut a

student out with your posture and expressions? When you communicate with an Adult Child, you are communicating with someone who recognizes these signals immediately, and "knows" what they mean, even if you do not. Sharon Wegsheider describes communication within the alcoholic family by saying "[Family members] may respond as though they take [one's] behavior at face value, but at some level they sense a second, subliminal message coming from the real self that [one] has repressed" (Wegsheider, 1981). For this reason it is important for you to communicate as clearly as possible, so that a student does not infer what is not being implied.

Make it possible for a student to learn things on her own, by providing easy resources and educational opportunities. The value of a few well-worded informational fliers or pamphlets can not be understated. Make sure students are aware of services, support groups, counselors that are available to them. Most importantly, encourage students to speak to <u>each other</u> about their experiences and feelings. Insight from peers can be powerful, and the more people the student learns to trust with her feelings, the better her chances of developing with her classmates.

3) <u>Instill Trust</u>

Give of yourself as much as is reasonably possible. If the relationship permits, one-to-one meetings can be a convenient forum for the personal attention the student requires. Besides being a focused time to discuss the student's work (volunteer position,

leadership role, employment, etc.), it is also a private time, preferably behind closed doors, when the student has the attention of an adult authority figure. This is, again, likely to be a new environment for the Adult Child. He may have little to say at first, and even be uncomfortable in this setting, but a part of him will appreciate the opportunity to explore it if he comes to trust you.

It is best in the beginning not to repeat anything personal that comes out in a meeting, no matter how insignificant it seems to you, (unless, of course, for the student's safety it should be brought to the attention of another professional, such as a counselor, residence director, or Dean of Students). Your silence shows the student you respect his privacy and that you are listening to what he says, not just gathering material for another conversation. Remember the Adult Child comes out of an environment where he has been ridiculed and his human dignity disrespected. He may test you with harmless -- even false -- information to see where it ends up, or in what form it returns to him.

Your choice to give information of yourself must be made carefully. Some students are better equipped to handle your personal history than others. It may be helpful for a student to know that you have had experiences similar to his; it shows that you empathize with what he is feeling. The Student Affairs professional who is also an Adult Child, especially if he is in recovery, can become a role model to a student who thinks he has nothing better to hope for.

On the other hand, he may suspect that you are no better off than he is, and have little to offer in the way of guidance.

It is a paradox of abuse that the abused person will cling valiently to his loyal feelings toward his abuser, and this is especially so of children and their parents. In reflecting on his own recovery, psychologist Steven Farmer recalls, "...for years I carried the blame for not having made my mom and dad feel better about themselves." Even when he had realized that his parents' violence came out of their feelings of inadequacy, Farmer blamed himself for those feelings. You should avoid at all costs the temptation to take a stand against a student's parents. As much as you intend this as a show of your support, you risk losing your student's trust in your judgement and loyalty.

4) Respect the Adult Child Experience

When you realize how encompassing our childhood experiences are, you see that what has been said about cross-cultural understanding applies as well to the understanding of the Adult Child experience: "everyone perceives the world differently and...members of one culture group share basic sets of perceptions [different] than...members of other culture groups.... The way we perceive the world, what we expect of it and what we think about it, is so basic and so engrained, is buried so deep[ly] in us and in our unconscious that we continuously act and react without thinking why -- without even realizing that we might think why" (Singer, 1976).

Child development experts have identified certain roles which children play within their families of origin, and these roles and behaviors will continue into adulthood. Rarely do two children from the same family play the same role, which explains why siblings often disagree about the nature of their home environment. While these roles are called by different names, they are typically the Enabler (Codependent), the Hero (Model, Perfectionist, Caretaker), the Scapegoat (Rebel), Lost Child (Invisible Child), or Mascot (Clown, Peacemaker). The Adult Child will play her role in her new environment as well, because this is the person she has been trained to be. In order to help her develop out of her role, you

will need to work within that role's boundaries. Again, it is important to encourage her to explore <u>why</u> she reacts to situations as she does, <u>why</u> she makes the choices that she does, and how she perceives herself within her new environment. Only by understanding her behavior and her motives can she hope to change it.

5) <u>Encourage Involvement</u>

You are already aware of the value of involvement in the development and retention of the students on your campus. For the Adult Child, campus involvement (whether through a volunteer, leadership, or work-study position) is an excellent way for them to discover competence, autonomy, integrity, and sense of purpose, while exploring new relationships and the emotions that go along with them. Robert Ackerman writes, "...when a student's feelings of

self-worth are minimal, he or she may have to be persuaded that his or her participation is needed" (Ackerman, 1983). Remember to respect the skills that they already possess and to acknowledge the boundaries of their family training. Let the Lost Child work alone, for example, if that is what makes her comfortable, and draw her gently into the group. These students are usually highly creative and intelligent, having spent years learning to entertain themselves. Capitalize on the extroversion of the Mascot, who feels responsible for the happiness of the group, while providing opportunities for her to explore what makes her happy.

Adult Children need encouragement to participate in physical activities in order to develop their physical competence; they also may react negatively to adventure-based team building and leadership experiences and require more time and patience in trusting others with their bodies.

Emphasize balance and set limits while encouraging Adult Children to participate on campus. They have inherited tendencies toward obsessive and addictive behavior and may need guidance in monitoring their level of commitment.

6) Discourage Self-Abuse

Overcommitment is one manifestation of self-abuse, as are compulsive behaviors such as substance abuse and eating disorders. These are the overt signs of self-abuse. There are subtler forms Adult Children use to abuse themselves, which should be challenged

and corrected each time they surface. Listen to the language the student uses to describe himself. Listen to the names he calls himself without even realizing he does it: "That was really dumb," "What a loser," etc. He may preface his ideas and opinions with disclaimers: "This is probably way off the subject, but..." "Don't think this is stupid..." "I don't suppose that..." He may request, as he hands you a piece of work, "Don't laugh." Address those disclaimers and statements in your responses. "Why would I laugh?" you might say, or "That's not a dumb idea, there just might be some complications to making it work." Point out to the student when he calls himself names; encourage him to see the difference between words that describe his actions, and not himself. For example, he may have acted carelessly in carrying out a task, or have spoken hastily when dealing with a client, but this does not make him lazy, stupid, or "a loser."

When mistakes are made, even serious ones, remember to react to the behavior and not to the individual, and make sure the student understands this is what is happening. When he performs well, it is the individual who should receive the praise, and not his actions. Put simply, praise the doer; punish the deed. In an educational environment, a student should not be afraid to make mistakes, and should not have to worry about losing his acceptance when he does.

7) Know Your Own Limits

New professionals have a lot of energy and passion, and often become overwhelmed by a relationship with a particular student. Adult Children require a tremendous amount of energy, especially before they discover the training behind their motivation and seek recovery. The greatest mistake the Student Affairs professional can make is to take a therapist's stance with a student, if that is not what they are trained to do. Ackerman warns, when speaking of childcare practitioners and education professionals, "If they are not trained as therapists, they should not try to act as therapists" (Ackerman, 1983). Recognize when it is time to refer a student to another professional, whether it is a college counselor or an outside professional who deals specifically with this student's issues. Know the names and numbers of specialists and support groups in your area. If possible, learn what type of behavior they consider worthy of referral.

Read the literature. Research into the Adult Child experience is the most active it has ever been, and if it is not an experience that you understand or can recognize, it will be helpful for you to learn as much as you can about it.

Be honest about your own feelings toward your students. Bryan Robinson writes, "Give yourself permission to say you have difficulty liking this [student], if that is how you honestly feel. Practitioners do not have to like all [students] the same, but they

are obligated to treat all [students] fairly and help them meet their needs" (Robinson, 1989). Remember, too, that the way a student reacts to you may not have anything at all to do with you. Adult Children can be angry, cynical, distrusting people who will try to hurt you before you can hurt them. Their behavior should not affect you personally.

If you are yourself the Adult Child of a dysfunctional family, you must be careful not to project your own feelings and experiences onto your students. They can not be expected to develop and recover at the same rate that you have (or are), or to recognize the behavior that you recognize. Their experiences are their own, and they must accept and respond to them at their own rates. Do not use a student as a way to find recovery for yourself, or to correct mistakes you feel were made with you. Your common experience may be a starting place for a trusting relationship with a student, but if it is exploited, then it is only self-serving and will not benefit the student at all.

In her keynote address to the 1990 ACPA National Convention, Nel Nodding said succinctly, "An ethical person puts people over principles." In the daily business of student affairs professionals this means accepting the obstacles individual students face in their development and helping them dismantle these obstacles, rather than insisting that they conform to types we study in the classroom, and becoming exasperated with them because they can not do so.

John Bradshaw speaks of the factors he considers in estimating the recovery time of each of his clients. He evaluates first what type of abuse the individual experienced, (sexual abuse taking the longest time to heal), and the length of time that abuse was endured. Lastly, he asks himself, " Is there somebody to whom this individual matters?" (Bradshaw, 1990) The more people that Adult Child matters to, the better his chances of recovery. Bryan Robinson agrees: "A close, intimate relationship with just one significant adult makes a big difference in their lives" (Robinson, 1989). Many of us in Student Affairs become those persons to whom someone matters. By meeting students where they are and guiding them within a safe and functional environment, we can show them that we trust them to succeed, and that we will not reject them if they do not.

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